

CHAPIN (BALL PERRY)

It was an eventful day in 1868 when Margaret Agusta Chapin came from Saint Louis to Upper Alton to visit her sister, Isabella Chapin Ball (Mrs. Sylvester), and while there let a contract to build a house. It was not until 1870 that the house was finished and Miss Chapin moved from Saint Louis to Upper Alton.

Miss Chapin had come from Albany, N. Y. to Saint Louis with her father, mother, four brothers and two sisters. After graduating with the first class from Mount Holyoke Seminary she had obtained a position as a teacher at Monticello Seminary but her home was still in Saint Louis. After leaving Monticello she started teaching in the Saint Louis schools, a position she held for thirty years.

During this time she had invested her earnings in property in Upper Alton which at that time was a flourishing Village. Her sister, Isabella Chapin Ball, had lived in Upper Alton for a number of years and was well established in a beautiful, large brick home on what is now Washington Avenue. Their younger sister, Ulrica Chapin, had married Edward Marlack and at that time lived on a farm north of Upper Alton. Two children, Jenny and John, were born to this marriage.

Miss Chapin's father, Erastus Chapin, had been commissioned a Lieutenant in the U. S. Army in 1818 and was promoted to Captain in 1820. When the War with Mexico broke out he went as a Colonel.

Although there were six sons and three daughters born to Erastus and Ulrica Chapin only four of the boys came West. The other two settled in Springfield, Mass. Of the four boys who came to Saint Louis, Josiah died of cholera in 1849, John died of cholera in 1855 and Watson was killed when a young colt he was breaking to harness ran away on Bozza Street in Alton. The fourth brother, William Chapin, joined the U. S. Army and during the Civil War was commissioned a Major. After the war he returned to Upper Alton and lived there until his death.

Miss Chapin was very much interested in politics and longed for the day when women would have the right to vote. This wish was denied her as she died a short time before women in Illinois were allowed to vote. Building houses became a hobby with her and for a time a new house was built every few years. Then she started adding to the ones she had already built. To her a small cottage was a disgrace to the community.

In the meantime, Jenny Matlack had grown to womanhood and had married John R. Perry in Saint Louis. In the spring of 1885 they moved to Upper Alton with their three little boys. There was a house of such historic fame located at what is now Washington and Amelia Streets. It had been built years before and was known as the half way house between Saint Louis and all points north. Captain Barnard who was Captain of a boat on the Mississippi owned the house and had remodeled it and built on a room resembling a cabin on a steamboat. This was the house that the Perrys bought and lived in until 1912.

Miss Chapin was a scholar and always was very interested in the issues of the day. Her philosophy of life is brought forth in the following article:

"I am not afraid to live alone, but I dare not marry, only on right motives. I dare not marry unworthily. Is not this true heroism? The woman who can bear the burden of life alone - who submits cheerfully to a single life when circumstances have been unkind, who chooses it from a strong sense of duty, or accepts it for the sake of loyalty to a high ideal, is a brave woman. There is an element of grandeur in her composition and she is so far superior to those who marry for a home, or for convenience or from fear of becoming old maids, that there is no comparison between them. But, after all, the woman who does this, simply demands to be let alone. She begs that you will not suppose her insensible to a stab because she does not cry out. She has her pride and her delicacy. She urges no claims upon admiration, but she has no consciousness of disgrace. One would naturally prefer a swift death by a dull weapon and the dullards who exercise their weak wits upon such a woman, should be pilloried by public scorn."

Although she was an old lady of eighty four she still was able to look after her real estate and in so doing she arrived at the fatal day when she fell off some steps. There were no bones broken but the shock was too great for her to stand and in a few days she passed on and was buried beside the rest of her family in Bellefontaine Cemetery in Saint Louis.

The only remaining house which Miss Chapin built is located at 1914 Washington Avenue, Alton. The heirs sold the property after Mrs. Perry's death to Mr. Ed James who developed it into an Addition that has contributed much to the beauty and welfare of Upper Alton. It is known as the "Chapin Addition" and one of the streets is named "Chapin Place."

The only surviving heir of Miss Chapin living in this vicinity is Edith Perry Harrod (Mrs. B. M.) of Wood River.